

Pertussis Testing Notice

Dear Provider,

As you know, Alaska is experiencing a pertussis epidemic this year. Due to limited resources and increased testing demand, the Alaska State Public Health Laboratory (ASPHL) is issuing the following requests to providers:

- Review pertussis testing guidelines, and only submit samples when clearly indicated.
- Consider utilizing commercial laboratories when testing specimens obtained from insured patients.

Testing guidelines

The Alaska Section of Epidemiology has published testing criteria and guidelines (see resources below) that help clarify when a sample should be submitted. Examples of when a test for pertussis probably should not be ordered include patients with no symptoms (regardless of contact to a case), patients with coughing longer than 30 days, and symptomatic close contacts to a laboratory confirmed case (treatment without testing would probably be preferred).

Outside laboratories

ASPHL provides pertussis testing free of charge, primarily to ensure that barriers to testing do not exist for uninsured and underinsured individuals. Commercial laboratories may be used as an alternative to ASPHL for individuals with health insurance or other means to pay. Turnaround time for commercial laboratories may be comparable to ASPHL turnaround times, as ASPHL currently only performs pertussis testing twice a week.

In summary, at this time ASPHL continues to offer pertussis testing (PCR and culture) free of charge, in order to ensure that all Alaskans have access to appropriate testing, regardless of their ability to pay. In order to conserve ASPHL's resources during Alaska's pertussis epidemic, we ask providers and facilities to review and follow established testing guidelines, and to utilize commercial laboratories when feasible. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Bernd Jilly, Ph.D., MT(ASCP), HCLD(ABB)CC

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Resources

Alaska Section of Epidemiology Diagnosis and Treatment Guidelines (available at: <http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/dod/pertussis/PertussisDiagTreat.pdf>)